

**Statement by Dr. Shamshad Akhtar,
Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations & Executive Secretary of
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**Regional launch of the World Water Development Report 2017 on Wastewater:
the Untapped Resource**

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[Check against delivery]

Your Excellency Mr. Gamini Jayawickrema Perera, Chair of the Third APFSD, Minister of Sustainable Development and Wildlife, Sri Lanka

Excellencies,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the regional launch of the World Water Development Report 2017 on *Wastewater: the Untapped Resource*.

Wastewater generally receives little social and political attention in comparison to water supply challenges. Yet the two are intrinsically related, especially in the context of water scarcity. Neglecting wastewater can have highly detrimental impacts on the sustainability of water supplies, human health, the economy and the environment. An estimated 871,000 deaths globally were caused by the contamination of drinking water, inadequate handwashing facilities, and by inappropriate or inadequate sanitation services.¹

The Asia-Pacific region is experiencing increased competition for limited freshwater across key sectors and is facing a serious water and sanitation crisis. Between 70 to 90 per cent of urban and industrial wastewaters are discharged untreated². This pollutes valuable ground and surface water resources as well as damages coastal ecosystems, poses serious health threats, impacts food security, and causes economic loss both locally and regionally.

To address global water scarcity and ambient water quality, the *World Water Development Report 2017* provides a comprehensive overview of the enabling policy frameworks and governance mechanisms currently in place, as well as the technical aspects of preventing and reducing wastewater and pollution at the source. It also outlines the means to enhance wastewater collection, treatment, reuse and recovery.

I would like to draw your attention to two important and inter-related issues to ensure a proper focus on water and sanitation within the framework of improving readiness to implement SDG 6 in our region:

First, we need policy and institutional reforms to ensure a practical shift towards resilient water-hazards infrastructure. These reforms should promote technical solutions for

¹ United Nations World Water Development Report 2017

² ESCAP, UN-Habitat, AIT (2015). Policy Guidance Manual on Wastewater Management with a Special Emphasis on Decentralized Wastewater Treatment Systems (DEWATS).

decentralized wastewater treatment systems. Such decentralized solutions provide higher environmental, social and economic benefits. Research shows that these benefits could be very significant. For example, they could result in GDP gains of up to 7.2 per cent in Cambodia and 6 per cent in Lao PDR. They would also provide opportunities for small private business development and diversify the revenue income to the state budget through enabled wastewater and sanitation markets.³

Second, smart budget appraisals can lead to impactful investments in efficient water and sanitation services to ensure sound returns on investments as well as direct and indirect benefits. Investments in water management and wastewater treatment have proven to be an efficient use of financial resources. For every dollar invested in water and sanitation services, there is a \$4.30 return in the form of reduced health care costs⁴ and additional savings from reduced environmental damage. Local authorities should be able to compensate for financing and revenue collection deficiencies⁵ by capturing its resource benefits and by motivating the efforts of private sector and service providers.

Experts from our region have shared examples of integrated policy frameworks addressing water and sanitation issues and both the SDG 6 on water and the *SDG 11 on inclusive and sustainable cities*. ESCAP has compiled over 20 case studies within a new e-learning course that is now available on the Asia-Pacific Knowledge Platform on Sustainable Development. In partnership with the relevant ministries and stakeholders in a number of countries, including Sri Lanka, Tajikistan and Fiji to name a few, ESCAP has also developed a framework for the integration of SDGs with a focus on SDG 6 on water and sanitation that can be used for local planning as well as local and regional capacity development.

With this in mind, I hope that the panel deliberations today will elicit efficient and innovative examples of coherent policy responses, which stimulate support from markets and facilitate the socio-economic benefits of wastewater.

I would like to thank UNESCO for their partnership in organizing this event and for collaboration on the *World Water Development Report 2017*, which is another example of the United Nations system 'delivering as one'.

I thank you.

³ ESCAP (2015). Market opportunities for DEWATS in South East Asia. Discussion Paper. Available at <http://www.unescap.org/resources/market-opportunities-decentralised-wastewater-treatment-systems-south-east-asia>

⁴ WHO, 2014.

⁵ ESCAP, 2015, page 125